

Statement of Representative Ben Ray Luján
Health Subcommittee Markup: 21st Century Cures Act
May 14, 2015

I appreciate many provisions in this bill and how far we have come from the initial draft. For example, I am especially pleased by the increase in funding for the National Institute of Health. This funding would increase support for awards to academic researchers at institutions across the country, including Hispanic Serving Institutions. Those awards would support the advancement of science and enable students at these institutions to gain valuable experience working in a lab funded by NIH dollars.

For America to succeed we need to recognize the importance of increasing women and minority participation in these important STEM fields and I hope that NIH's strategic plan will support efforts to increase recruitment and support of minority and women scientist.

The 21st Century Cures Initiative has focused on identifying ways to get treatment and cures to patients faster. The National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) has shown that one way to do this is by investing in research to improve the clinical trial process. I am encouraged by the success of innovative late-stage pre-clinical drug development programs run by NCATS. I am particularly excited by the success of the Bridging Interventional Development Gaps or BrIDGs program. As of October, four BrIDGs-supported agents have gone as far as Phase II clinical trials and third-parties have licensed at least eight agents as a result of their development by the BrIDGs program.

This is an excellent example of Technology Transfer. As the founder of the Technology Transfer Caucus, this is a top priority of mine. I'm very excited about the potential for Tech Transfer in 21st Century Cures and look forward to the benefits of eliminating some of the harmful restrictions on the NCATS program.

Additionally, 21st Century Cures includes language based off of bipartisan legislation I introduced last Congress with Congressman Gus Bilirakis, the Medicare Part D Patient Safety and Drug Abuse Prevention Act. The revised Section 3141 would allow Medicare prescription drug plans to develop safe prescribing and dispensing programs to prevent fraud and abuse in the dispensing of controlled substances. I'm glad that the 21st Century Cures provision keeps the scope of our bill by applying this provision to all types of Medicare Part D plans and addressing all controlled substances. I have worked on this issue in Congress after both the GAO and HHS-OIG found that prescription drug "Lock-in" programs could potentially improve patient safety and reduce costs in the Medicare program. Importantly, as currently drafted, section 3141 now also includes critical beneficiary notification provisions and consultation with health providers. Overall, the Part D lock-in proposal in this draft strikes the right balance to preserve important beneficiary protections but also address clearly documented program integrity concerns within the Medicare Part D program. I want to commend Congressman Bilirakis for his work on this issue.